DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 092 997 CS 500 717

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TITLE Phenomenological and Transactional Study of Intercultural Communication.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (19th, New Orleans, April 17-20, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Communication (Thought Transfer); *Cross Cultural Studies; *Educational Research; Higher Education; Human Relations; Models; *Research Tools; Resource Materials; *Theories

ABSTRACT

This paper presents pretheory and theory for an approach to the study of intercultural communication and discusses the phenomenological basis of a theory of transaction, applying it to case study and comparative methods of analysis. The unit of analysis is denoted as an ABX paradigm and may be described as a communication dyad in a triadic universe of data. A and B are human agencies from different cultures whose relationship is one of communication interchange. X is the symbol system by which they communicate. ABX is not treated as an objective system but is considered for its analytic uses as an instrument of observation. (Author/RB)

ED 092997

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND TRANSACTIONAL STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Prepared for delivery at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association, Monteleone Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 17-20

CS500 7/7

Phenomenological and Transactional Study of Intercultural Communication.

This paper presents pre-theory and theory for an approach to the study of intercultural communication. It discusses the phenomenological basis of a theory of transaction and applies this theory to case study and comparative methods of analysis.

Phenomenological perception is understood to include both impression and expression, so that ontological reality is centered in the self which through its acts gains self-awareness (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1962). Culture is regarded as a preference for certain forms of interactive behavior, and it shapes both the impressive and expressive dimensions of perception. Consequently inter-cultural communication inevitably involves special conditions of interaction.

The unit of analysis in this paper is denoted as an ABX system and may be described as a communication dyad in a triadic universe of data. A and B are human agencies from different cultures whose relationship is one of communication interchange (Harms, 1973, 51). X is the symbol system by which they communicate. ABX is not treated as an objective system here, as it has been for other purposes by Newcomb (1953). What is considered are the implications for its analytic use if it were regarded as phenomenal for the observer.

The reason for considering ABX this way is contingent on the theory of transactions. It is possible to imagine communication between A and B in which some sort of intercultural hybrid or ad hoc symbol system is used that is unapparent to a would-be observer. Phenomenologically the symbol system used by them cannot be immediately apparent to an onlooker without the potential bias of his own cultural perception. It may even be so foreign or so subtle to him as to be literally invisible. Lacking the presence of recognizable symbols, a potential observer can only wait upon some significant event to arrest his attention and indicate the presence of a communication interchange.

This event is what is called here a transaction. Perception of a transaction is the first instance of observation and corresponds to what has been called a "basic phenomenon" by Thayer (1968, 26). The transactional event attracts the attention of a perceiving onlooker, and if he treats the phenomenon as a <u>case</u> his role of observation logically follows. Since the observer cannot see X he theorizes its presence as necessary for interchange communication between A and B and then proceeds by evidentiary steps to confirm its presence by means of his direct access to A and B. Even though X is outside his phenomenal

field, the observer does require information about it in order to verify that the theoretical transaction has actually taken place between A and B. And beyond that he needs information about X in order to define variables of interaction between A and B, which are required for his subsequent objective comparison of different cases.

A transaction happens for the observer, whereas it happens to A and B. Transaction refers to an event in which there is simultaneous change in the agent, the phenomena encountered by the agent, and what is symbolized or known about these encounters (Kariel, 1973). All that is apparent to the observer is an event in his field, a perceived change in the relationship between two objects in his view. But he theorizes that if the change he has perceived may be defined as a transaction between A and B, they are in a relationship of communication interchange. Transaction is conceptualized in terms of communicative interchange between A and B so that their phenomenal experiences are made unavoidably contingent. To say that their transactional experiences are contingent means that the change in A's phenomenal field is connected with the change in B and the change in B's field is connected with the change in A, and this experience is shared in terms of a common X. In this way the transactional event contains a communication interchange.

Both A and B will perceive that the change in their respective phenomenal fields is actually contingent in the event of a transaction between them. But of course not all communication between A and B is transactional, as in a situation where A is in authority over B. For example, two speakers of French may experience a shift from the use of formal to informal direct address. If speaker A says "you may use tu with me" and B thereupon complies, the change in language may not be fully supported by a change in the authority relationship insofar as A has implicitly reserved the right to redefine the linguistic relationship at a later time. Despite the congruence of the linguistic change, some non-linguistic factors in the setting of this interaction prevent it from succeeding fully as a transaction. A reverse situation could be imagined where a change in role interaction remains incomplete because words are lacking to break the ice. Hence, the event of a transaction means there is a change in both symbolic and role interaction.

Examples of transaction appear in the phenomena of stylistic shifting described with simultaneous linguistic and social definition by Joos (1967). Suppose A and B are strangers to one another and they therefore use a formal style of language to communicate. Normally they will speak very properly and

will not interrupt one another. Then, perhaps without either A or B being certain why, their interaction changes and becomes more casual. Both A and B elide the formal flourishes, use slang expressions (i.e., language that is currently in vogue), and interrupt one another easily. Both A and B realize they feel differently about one another and that they are using a different style of language. They would agree that their relationship has changed from formal to informal or casual. They are aware of the linguistic and social changes between them, which altogether add up to a transactional change in their relationship. As actors they are not immediately interested in what caused the transaction, although they are competent to give information to the observer pertaining to such causes.

Upon assuming the role of observation, the observer must take account of the changes his presence as observer makes in the ABX system's transactive characteristics. He has to approach A and B to inquire about X, which is outside his own phenomenal field. Not to communicate with them at this point would fix ABX as a simple phenomenal object and preclude any test of the theoretical transaction. Of course nothing prevents A or B from performing observation of their own respective activities, but they cannot logically be in an interchange relationship and at the same time simply be observing each other. The transaction occurs between A and B, and the observer approaching them wishes to avoid touching off further transactions between himself and them since this would cut him off from their X. Two things help him to control here. He has made a preliminary observation of the relationship existing between A and B before his presence necessarily becomes significant to them, which provides him with a reference pattern. And his interaction with each of the transactants follows rather than precedes the event of their transaction, so that his appearance is likely to be less interruptive in their phenomenal fields that if he approached them individually beforehand.

If the ABX system were being used denotively for monocultural analysis, the observer could be warranted in approaching A and B as potential rather than accomplished interactants. For example, Newcomb (1953) approaches them as potential interactors. The orientation of A to B and X is not contingent upon B's orientation to A and X. At most there are strains towards symmetry. But the actions of A and B are contingent when the system is transactional. Contingency changes the nature of ABX as a data system, since the observer can only confirm contingency in terms of the non-inferential information about X that A and B alone can supply. Contingency is critically important to the theory of trans-

actional interchange because the difference in A's and B's cultures is salient. The symbol system X is the only objective link between A and B. It is a mediating construct between them, which defines the extent of their mutual experience, and it does not go beyond their phenomenal experience. Media that are objective apart from their experience must be separately denoted, as in an ABCX system (Westley and MacLean, 1957).

If the observer can identify a unique X, based on separate reports by A and B about their interaction, and if there is correlation in terms of X between A's and B's separate reports of A's change of behavior and between their reports of B's change of behavior, the observer may conclude that a transaction has occurred. Thus the observer has a means of cross-checking variables he defines in relation to X, and these variables become his own definition of X.

These variables fall into two interdependent categories, which may be labelled tentatively as instrumental and volitional. The two categories include matters which arise in sociolinguistics and social psychology respectively. A and B are able to define certain limits in their transaction, according to where it began and where it stopped. They may report a deficiency of similar instruments with which to communicate or a deficiency of willingness to use instruments which were similar and available. But anyhow these two variable categories are made interdependent. This is a result of the transactional case study approach, as anticipated by Pride (1971).

Up to this point the observer has performed analytic steps of inference and evidence. The remaining step is interpretation or evaluation. For this the observer compares different cases studies, so as to appraise the persistence of variables defined in the cases. Persistence would indicate the achievement of an increased power of objective description. Presumably, any trans-cultural games of strategy, greater than the self-conscious intentions of A and B, that may lie behind transactional events would become apparent under this power of observation.

The major contours have been mapped for an approach to the study of intercultural communication. Some points may be considered regarding the application of this approach. First, it applies specifically to intercultural communication. Interchange transactions may occur between different nations that are in communication, but in such cases the critical variables would include things like law and politics. Questions of language difference would be subordinate (not to say unimportant) to such variables in international communication. Strictly, from the point of view of an international communication analyst, it must look as

though intercultural communication involves both formal and informal communication behavior.

A second consideration about the application of this approach is the level of activity it can describe. It applies pretty obviously to situations where A and B are individuals, which is a level defined as interpersonal intercommunication by Thayer (1968, 113). But it also applies to situations of intercommunication involving more than two persons, a level that is suggested in the words intercommunication among peoples by Prosser (1973).

Not all the variety of possible configurations of people at A and B, pertaining to transactions in intercultural communication, can be defined at this point. But the elements of one case may be described for illustration, by reference to what is frequently called the charismatic phenomenon. Probably charisma is phenomenal because, as Weber (1918) pointed out, it is explained neither by tradition nor by right, reason, or law. The advent of charisma is generally accompanied by systematic changes in interactional behavior between peoples affected by it. The transactional event could take place in terms of closer relations between different cultural groups in the presence of shared charismatic symbols. Systematic observation would require that the image of a leader or office, objectively apparent to the observer, be approached through the phenomenal experience of the peoples involved.

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